



File Code: 1950

Date: October 21, 2011

**Dear Interested Party:**

The Idaho Panhandle National Forest (IPNF) is beginning the process of preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) to analyze a proposal to manage weeds across the entire Forest using both an integrated weed management approach and an adaptive management strategy. The DEIS will provide a detailed analysis of the environmental impacts of the proposal and alternatives. The title of the project is the *Idaho Panhandle National Forest Noxious Weed Treatment Project*.

The IPNF is requesting comments to assist in further developing our proposal and alternatives. Comments received will be used to help develop alternatives and refine the analysis to be conducted and documented in the DEIS.

**Purpose and Need for the Project:**

The overall goal for proposing this project is to reduce the undesirable impacts that these Non-Native Invasive Plant (NNIP) species have on native plant communities and other ecological, social or economic values. The specific purpose is to: (1) reduce the likelihood that new NNIP species (i.e. potential invaders) are introduced and become established; (2) prevent or limit the spread of existing invaders and established NNIP species into areas with few or no infestations, and/or into areas where the potential to harm ecological, social or economic values is high; (3) rapidly respond to new, small or recently discovered infestations before they become well established, and respond utilizing the most efficient and effective treatment method(s); (4) encourage beneficial native vegetation and weed resistant plant communities and; (5) increase public and agency use of weed prevention practices and general awareness of weeds.

Currently, each of the five Ranger Districts on the IPNF has an approved NNIP management plan and supporting EIS. Those plans were adopted between 11 and 16 years ago. Since then, numerous NNIP species have been added to the potential and new invader list, and new treatment tools, methods and adaptive management strategies have been developed that are currently not authorized for use on the IPNF. In order to be more effective and efficient in reducing the undesirable impacts of NNIP, the Forest needs to be able to utilize these newer tools and strategies. Given that funding for control has been declining in recent years, this need has become even stronger. The proposed action would allow the IPNF to become more responsive to Federal, State, and Forest Service laws, regulations, policies and direction regarding the management of NNIP.



**Proposed Action:**

The IPNF proposes to implement a Forest-wide, Integrated Weed Management (IWM) approach to manage NNIP species on National Forest System lands within the boundaries of the IPNF.

This area is approximately 2.5 million acres in size and includes portions of the following states and counties; Benewah, Bonner, Boundary, Clearwater, Shoshone, Kootenai and Latah counties in Idaho; Lincoln and Sanders counties in Montana; and Pend Oreille County in Washington.

The IWM approach incorporated into the proposal includes: inventory and assessment activities, prevention and education elements, treatment actions, implementation and effectiveness monitoring, and restoration activities. The IWM program is based on ecological factors and includes consideration of site conditions, other resource values and uses, NNIP characteristics, and potential effectiveness of control measures for specific circumstances.

The proposal includes both non-treatment and treatment practices such as: strategies for awareness and education in order to prevent new infestations; early detection of and rapid response to newly discovered infestations; control of outbreaks of existing infestations that threaten sensitive and native habitats; containment of established infestations by maintaining treatments along spread pathways and previously treated areas; use of all treatment "tools" such as chemical, manual and biological treatment followed by restoration and revegetation (as appropriate), as well as monitoring of NNIP- impacted lands; and close coordination across jurisdictional boundaries through cooperative partnerships.

The treatment activities that are proposed are based on integrated pest management principles and methods known to be effective for each target NNIP species. They include, but are not limited to, manual techniques such as pulling; cultural practices such as the use of certified noxious weed-free hay; biological control agents such as pathogens and insects; and herbicides that target specific invasive plant species. The application of herbicides would be ground based only. No aerial treatment activities are proposed. Spot and selective spraying would be the primary method of applying herbicide in order to target individual and groups of invasive plants; however some broadcast herbicide spraying (from trucks or ATV equipment) would occur. Specific design features would be applied to minimize or eliminate the potential for plant treatments to adversely affect non-target plants, animals, human health, water quality and aquatic organisms. Mulching, seeding and planting of competitive, desirable vegetation may occur to restore previously infested sites.

In addition to using an IWM approach, the proposal incorporates an adaptive management strategy in order to quickly respond to new NNIP species and new infestations that are located during the life of the project. This quick reaction is known as an Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) and is designed to allow timely control so that new infestations can be treated when they are small in order to reduce costs as well as any detrimental effects of treatment. The adaptive strategy would also allow the use of new treatment tools and methods that are developed during the life of the project.

The proposal allows most types of treatments to occur anywhere on Forest Service system lands on the IPNF. However, the use of herbicides in the Salmo-Priest wilderness area would be restricted to trailheads, roads immediately adjacent to the wilderness boundary, and short



distances along trails near trailhead locations. Based on current funding levels, it is expected that approximately 3,000 acres would be treated annually across the Forest with the majority of these acres being treated using some form of a ground-based herbicide application method. If a significant amount of additional funding were available and monitoring efforts identify the need, up to an additional 3,000 acres may be treated annually. The proposal would treat a maximum of 5,500 acres annually with herbicides (less than a quarter of one percent of the IPNF). No limit is proposed on the number of acres that may be treated using non-herbicide treatment methods. Most of the treatment activities would occur along travel or utility corridors (e.g. roads, trails, powerline clearings) or other disturbed areas such as campgrounds, trailheads, recent timber harvest areas, gravel pits, ski areas, fire camps, mines, helispots, ranger stations and burned areas. One of the prevention elements incorporated into the proposed action includes requiring that all hay or straw type products that are stored or possessed on NFS lands be state certified weed free.


### **Commenting:**

The comments that I receive will be used to help guide the development of the DEIS. Comments that would be most useful are those concerning developing or refining the proposed action, in particular those that can help us develop treatments that would be responsive to our goal to control, contain, or eradicate NNIP. It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such manner that they are useful to the agency's preparation of the DEIS. Therefore, I would appreciate receiving your comments by November 28, 2011. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, become part of the public record for this proposed action. However, comments submitted anonymously will also be accepted and considered.

Comments should be submitted to David Cobb, Idaho Panhandle National Forests Noxious Weed Treatment Project Team Leader, at the Priest Lake Ranger District, 32203 Highway 57, Priest River, ID 83856; Fax (208) 443-6845. You may also hand-deliver your comments to the above address during normal business hours from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Electronic comments may be submitted to [comments-northern-idpanhandle-priest-lake@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-northern-idpanhandle-priest-lake@fs.fed.us) in a format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc).

For more information you may contact David Cobb at the address above, by phone at (208) 443-6854, or by email at [dcobb@fs.fed.us](mailto:dcobb@fs.fed.us). Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

Sincerely,



MARY FARNSWORTH  
Forest Supervisor